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ELDORADO CANYON—COUNTERING STATE-SPONSORED TERRORISM  
FROM THE AIR



by

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A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN FULFILMENT OF THE CURRICULUM REQUIREMENT

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MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

March 1995

103 50724

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## ABSTRACT

TITLE: ELDORADO CANYON—Countering State-Sponsored Terrorism from the Air

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ELDORADO CANYON, the 1986 raid on Libya, was a hallmark event in US history. It was the first time the American military was used as a direct counter to terrorism, certainly from an air perspective. This work examines the national and international environment that set the stage for this mission. Further, it examines the stresses placed upon a wing when tactical, operational and national objectives are somewhat blurred. Finally, the successes and failures of the mission are examined, not merely for historical purposes. It is the author's belief that in the multi-polar, post-Cold War world we live in, with the continuing presence of "rogue-states" and state-sponsored terrorism, there is a chance of the USAF being involved in another mission such as ELDORADO CANYON.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel Michael B. Hoyes was commissioned from the United States Air Force Academy in 1976. After completing Undergraduate Navigator Training, he accumulated 1700 hours in the F-111A and F. In 1989, he completed a staff tour as a team member in the HQ USAFE Standardization and Evaluation Division, and received a Master of Aeronautical Science degree from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. He then formed the F-15E initial cadre stationed at Nellis AFB. While at Nellis, he accumulated 1100 F-15E hours, serving in the 422 Test and Evaluation Squadron and then as the Operations Officer, F-15E Division, USAF Weapons School. A combat veteran and one of the Checkmate planners during Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Lieutenant Colonel Hoyes is a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1995.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*"Feet Wet...Tranquil Tiger"*

*In Memory of:*

*Captain (Major Select) Fernando L. Ribas-Dominicci*

*&*

*Captain Paul F. Lorence*

At 0200 hours local time, on 15 April 1986, the first of the 2000-pound laser-guided bombs delivered by USAF F-111F aircraft operating in a joint venture, detonated at the Al Azziziyah Barracks in Tripoli, Libya. By 0215 hours, either "Feet Wet, Tranquil Tiger"—a code word meaning that the aircraft and its crew were returning north over the Mediterranean, their ordnance employed, or "Feet Wet, Frosty Freezer"—the crew was returning but would have to jettison its ordnance, was transmitted by all but one aircraft. After delaying the return trip for one hour in the vain hope of their return, it became clear: F-111F tail number 71-0389 and its crew, Captains Fernando Ribas-Dominicci (pilot) and Paul Lorence (Weapons Systems Officer, or "WSO"), call sign "Karma-52," would not be returning to home base that morning, or ever.

The 14-hour ELDORADO CANYON mission was the longest fighter combat mission, in terms of time and distance, ever flown in the history of military aviation, and it was flown against the most technologically sophisticated air defenses faced by any air force up to that time.<sup>1</sup> As a means of countering

terrorism, this mission is significant today, regardless of whether it is determined to have been a "success" or a "failure."

In 1984, President Reagan signed the National Security Decision Directive number 138, which outlined US policy toward terrorism. This directive profiled the use of preemptive and retaliatory strikes.<sup>2</sup> More than a decade later, President Clinton's February 1995 "Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement" indicates that in this multi-polar, post-Cold War world, one of the US's concerns is still terrorism:

As long as terrorist groups continue to target American citizens and interests, the United States will need to have specialized units available to defeat such groups. *From time to time, we might also find it necessary to strike terrorists at their bases abroad or to attack assets valued by the governments that support them.* Our policy in countering international terrorists is to make no concessions to terrorists, continue to pressure state sponsors of terrorism, fully exploit all available legal mechanisms to punish international terrorists and help other governments improve their capabilities to combat terrorism. The United States has made concerted efforts to punish and deter terrorists. On June 26, 1993, following a determination that Iraq had plotted an assassination attempt against former President Bush, President Clinton ordered a cruise missile attack against the headquarters of Iraq's intelligence service in order to send a firm response and deter further threats.<sup>3</sup> [Emphasis added]

The purpose of this enterprise then, is to examine the intricacies of countering terrorism from the air, using ELDORADO CANYON as the framework. Although this was a joint USN and USAF operation, only the USAF perspective will be addressed in detail. What was the national and international environment that led up to the attack? How did the unit prepare for the mission—was it ready? What were the results of the attack—was it successful? What lessons can be learned from this approach to countering terrorism—does current US policy portend the use of this means in the future?

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## *CHAPTER NOTES*

<sup>1</sup> Venkus: p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Martin: p. xviii.

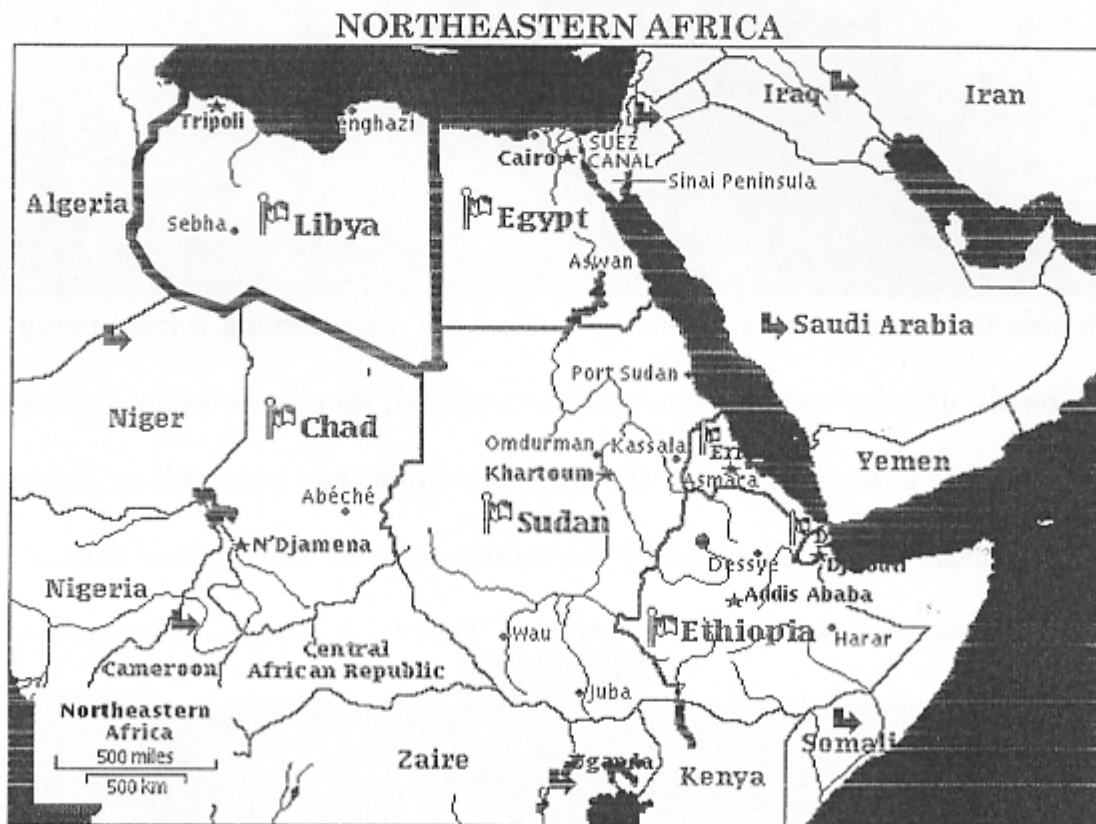
<sup>3</sup> Clinton: p. 10.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ENVIRONMENT

The mid-1980s saw an ominous increase in international terrorist activities sponsored by Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi, in his nefarious attempts to bolster both Libya's importance in the world and Pan-Arabism.<sup>1</sup> Qaddafi seemed intent on testing President Reagan's resolve. His activities placed Libya and the United States on a collision course.<sup>2</sup>

#### Libya—Qaddafi's Rise and the Proliferation of Terrorism



*Figure 1 (Source: Microsoft Bookshelf '94)*

The country ruled by Qaddafi is strategically located in North Africa, with 1,100 miles of Mediterranean coastline. Its land area of 685,524 square miles makes it the fifteenth largest country in the world, but it is hampered by having a population of only three and a half million people, about 90 percent of whom live in the fertile



coastal strip. Ninety percent of Libya consists of desert (mostly rocky), and the land contains few natural resources, but the one major resource—oil—made possible Libya's ascent to international recognition.<sup>3</sup>

On 1 September 1969, the man who led the coup that overthrew Libya's King Idris I, was Captain Muammar al-Qaddafi. Qaddafi was the only son of a poor illiterate tent-dwelling shepherd and from early on in his life "he possessed a deep indignation against injustice and felt hostility toward the rich and powerful."<sup>4</sup> The self-promoted Colonel Qaddafi and his Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) immediately set out to bring back traditional Islamic law to the nation. They outlawed ownership in business by other than "Arab Libyans," closed churches and synagogues, confiscated the Italian and Jewish community's property, and even went as far as unearthing the bones of Italians in cemeteries, and sent them to Italy.<sup>5</sup>

Qaddafi and the RCC achieved several successes in the early years. They were able to reverse a downward trend in Libyan oil, changing it from being consistently underpriced to consistently overpriced, thereby bringing in revenue to the state. Due to the increase in the state's revenue they were able to institute major domestic reform: They raised the minimum wage and lowered rent costs. They increased housing projects in earnest. They increased the proportion of the population receiving education, thereby increasing the literacy rate. They increased the number of health services offered while improving nutrition. Per capita income rose from \$2,168 in 1970 to \$9,827 in 1979, which surpassed Great Britain, Italy and Japan.<sup>6</sup> For all this "good," the tide changed in the mid 1970s for the Libyans.



Qaddafi was apparently shaken by a coup attempt in 1975, in which 100 army officers were involved. He introduced "revolutionary committees": rifle-toting bands of young zealots located in every neighborhood, factory, and government office, with the assigned task of spying on citizens.<sup>7</sup> Torture in prisons rose as did the institution of televised hangings. Notably, the work ethic of Libya, which had been on the rise, began to decline, which had the effect of making Libya one of the least industrialized Arab countries. From 1978 onwards, Qaddafi began a different sort of reform from his early 1970 days. Ownership of more than one car or home was forbidden. Bank accounts were frozen, with a limit of \$34,000 set.<sup>8</sup> Housing, food, and consumer goods were now in short supply, but massive expenditures went to terrorism, and the purchase of Soviet-made weapons. Qaddafi's population responded with their feet first.

In the early 1980s Libya began suffering a "brain drain:" some 50,000 to 100,000 of its people, to include most of the intelligentsia and the technocrats, left the country to reside abroad. Opposition groups emerged. Another coup attempt occurred on 8 May 1984. These actions and Qaddafi's response all served to isolate him from his people:

He was reduced by fear to living behind the protection of a fifteen-foot wall and tanks, rarely staying more than one night in any of his several residences, keeping his movements a secret (even from close advisers), riding in a convoy of armor-plated cars, employing identical decoy convoys and decoy airplanes, wearing a bullet-proof vest even at home, and employing tasters to prevent poisoning.<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, Qaddafi steadfastly focused on what author Brian Davis calls "his seven major motivations":

1. Preserve his regime.

2. Make great the once-forgotten country of Libya.
3. Strengthen Islam (regards Libya's oil wealth as a gift from GOD to be used in fighting the enemies of the state).
4. Pan-Arabism: Unite Arab nations with himself as the leader for the Arab world.
5. Israel/Palestine: No passion is greater than his hatred for Israel.
6. Anti-Imperialism: High level of antagonism towards the west.
7. Inveterate love of revolution and determination to upset the international status quo, which he sees as unjust.<sup>10</sup>

During the decade prior to the raid, Qaddafi seemed to become increasingly energetic with terrorist activities and inflammatory dialogue, as he attempted to fulfill those seven major motivations. Table 1 provides a sampling of the Qaddafi regime's thoughts on terrorism.

### A Sampling of the Qaddafi Regime's Thoughts on Terrorism

DATE	TEXT EXCERPT
1976	Qaddafi stated, "The bombs which are convulsing Britain and breaking its spirit are the bombs of the Libyan people."
27 April 1980	Qaddafi declared, "All persons who have left Libya must return by June 10...If the refugees do not obey they must be inevitably liquidated, wherever they are"
6 June 1980	Asked why Qaddafi was treating his political opponents so harshly, Ahmed Shehata, the head of Libya's Foreign Liaison Committee, said, "If the late President Nasser of Egypt had killed his opponents while they were in exile, then Anwar Sadat would not be in power there now."
11 June 1980	Qaddafi rejoiced that "the revolutionary committees have confirmed that the arm of the revolution is long and strong, and that they can reach any place in the world to strike at the enemies of the revolution...the Egyptian, Israeli, and US authorities deserve death everywhere."
Mid-1980	In recent months, Qaddafi had "publicly called upon Palestine groups to attack Egyptian, Israeli, and American targets in the Middle East" according to Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David D. Newsome.
October 1982	Qaddafi warned Libyan exiles to "repent" and return to the Jamahiriyyah. "They should be killed not because they constitute any danger, but because of their high treason."
11 June 1984	Qaddafi blamed the US for the dramatic coup attempt the previous month, and in this context he stated, "We are capable of exporting terrorism to the heart of America."
March 1985	In an interview with the pro-Libyan daily Al-Safir, Qaddafi said: "Would not the Arabs stand up for themselves for once and divorce the United States for good. Unless you do this, I will take up my responsibility and start terrorism against Arab rulers. I will threaten and terrify them. I will sever relations and sever their heads one by one."
31 March 1985	"We want to resurrect this spirit in this Arab nation, the spirit of martyrdom. We want every one of us to say: I have decided to die just to spite America, because this decision is one that America can not veto."

10 April 1985	Qaddafi warned President Reagan not to interfere in Sudan in the aftermath of the overthrow of Nimiery, and stated, "We will have to carry the battle to the very heartland of those who are interfering."
1 September 1985	Qaddafi declared: "The Western states—all of them—are now conspiring against us; they have been transformed into arenas for training in terrorism against us."
1 January 1986	In a press conference Qaddafi stated, "The Palestinian action is the most sacred action on earth in this era because it concerns fighting by people who have been wronged."
2 January 1986	"An English language report on Libyan television said Libya was forming suicide squads to attack American and Western European interests in Libya."
8 January 1986	Qaddafi told a gathering of seven Western European ambassadors, "If the United States attacks me, I'll become a madman. If attacked from American bases in Europe, then we have to close our eyes and ears and hit indiscriminately. We are going to react with suicide squads against towns, ports, etc."
15 January 1986	Referring to radical Arab grouping in Libya, Qaddafi stated, "I accept all their resolutions. I announce that they will be trained for terrorist and suicide missions."
4 March 1986	The General People's Congress in Libya called for "working for forming suicide squads to wreck US-Zionist interests everywhere."
5 March 1986	Qaddafi declared, "Any person who left Libya is now in the hostile ranks on America's side. He is finished."
26 March 1986	Libyan radio "urged that the Arab nation transform itself in its entirety into suicide squads and into human bombs."
28 March 1986	Libyan radio called it "the duty of all Arabs to make everything American...a military target."
15 April 1986	After the US air raids, Libyan radio addressed Arabs: "Attack everything American...Rip apart the bodies of the Americans, be they military or civilians. Drink their blood."

*Table 1* (Source: Davis' *Qaddafi, Terrorism, and the Origins of the U.S. Attack on Libya*)

The culmination of the events in 1986 took place at 0149 hours on 5 April. A bomb went off in the washroom of the La Belle disco in West Berlin.<sup>11</sup> Authors Martin and Walcott wrote, "The disco was packed with American soldiers. Sgt. Kenneth Ford was killed instantly; Sgt. James Goins was mortally wounded; a young Turkish woman also was killed."<sup>12</sup> This was the final act by Qaddafi-sponsored terrorists that brought about the raid. The raid was no "hair-trigger" response by the US, but one that marked the culmination of a period of frustration with terrorism.

### United States—Increasing the Military “Tool” and National Will

The period following the Vietnam war for the US military was one of a divided American society, many of whom learned to distrust the military organization due to “failed” operations such as Desert One in 1980. “Nothing—not even the Watergate crisis—so profoundly shook America’s self-confidence after Vietnam as the failure of that rescue attempt.”<sup>13</sup> In 1983, those who distrusted the military could “hang their hats” on the tragedy in Beirut.

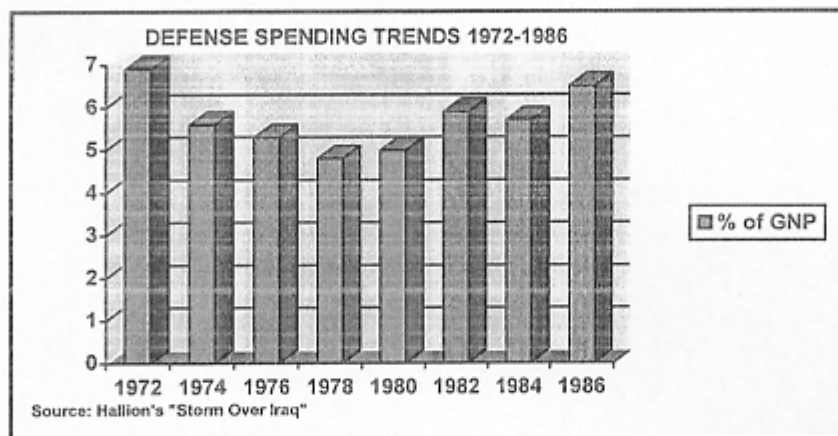
A marine force sent to Beirut as part of a multinational peacekeeping force suffered 341 casualties (241 of whom died) to a terrorist truck bomb on October 23. What made this even more horrible was that they had been sent there without clear purpose in response to pressure from the UN, the NSC, and the Department of State, in direct opposition to the wishes of the secretary of defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>14</sup>

During the Carter years, although the defense budget increased slightly, it still did not keep up with inflation, thus President Carter’s budget still reduced buying power. Hence, according to Hallion:

- 1) Entering enlisteds received 84% of the federal minimum wage.
- 2) 7% of the fleet was grounded for supply shortages, creating a “hollow force.”
- 3) Active duty and DoD civilian employment decreased.<sup>15</sup>

President Reagan sought to reverse the trend. He is purported as stating, “In US military strength we are already *second to one*; namely the Soviet Union.”<sup>16</sup> [Emphasis added] His goal was to fix the “hollow force.” During his eight years as president, with public approval, military spending increased by \$85 billion. Between 1980 and 1986, procurement, research, development, test and evaluation

and construction budget increased 157%, while operations and maintenance budget increased 60%.<sup>17</sup> "Black" programs budget for research and development (which produced systems like Desert Storm's popular F-117 stealth fighter) increased by 300%.<sup>18</sup> The downward trend of military spending as a percentage of GNP was reversed (see Chart 1 "Defense Spending Trends 1972-1986").



*Chart 1*

Additionally, the president had a message for would-be terrorists. Seven days after his inauguration, in a speech on 27 Jan 1981 welcoming the American hostages home from Iran, President Reagan declared:

"Let terrorists be aware that when the rules of international behavior are violated, our policy will be one of swift and effective retribution. We hear it said that we live in an era of a limit to our powers. Well, let it be understood, there are limits to our patience."<sup>19</sup>

President Reagan therefore set the stage for heated discussion on the issue of retaliation against terrorism. On the one hand, there were leaders both inside and outside the administration who made the argument that military force can avail for nothing against terrorism. This view held that terrorists were "an invincible variety of fighters, not susceptible to being deterred, dissuaded, disheartened, or



even discouraged in any way; attacking them would only satisfy their craving for martyrdom.”<sup>20</sup> This view also held that fighting terrorism with terrorism would relinquish the moral high ground to those we despise. On the other side were those that felt that allowing the terrorists to attack with impunity fanned the flames of increased terrorist activities. They contended that defensive measures alone would not suffice, and that retaliation against terrorists by the United States would have a deterrent effect. Former Secretary of State Alexander Haig advocated, “The punishment necessary to defeat the terrorists, not a ‘tit for tat’ which leaves to them the choice of escalation.”<sup>21</sup> Worldwide terrorist activities only served to galvanize the American population for action. Table 2 provides a sampling of such activities from 1979 to 1986.

**A Sampling of Activities — 1979 - 1986**

DATE	EVENT
4 November 1979	Militant Iranian students take over the American Embassy in Tehran, kidnapping sixty-six Americans. Fifty-two hostages will be held a total of 444 days.
24 April 1980	A mission to rescue the hostages held in Tehran is forced to abort in the middle of the Iranian desert.
30 April 1980	Iranian extremists seize the Iranian Embassy in London taking twenty hostages. Five days later, after a hostage is killed, British commandos storm the embassy, killing five of the six gunmen.
20 January 1981	The fifty-two American hostages held in Tehran are released and leave Iran minutes after Reagan is sworn in.
6 May 1981	The State Department orders the closing of the Libyan People's Bureau in Washington.
13 May 1981	Pope John Paul II is shot in St. Peter's Square by Turkish gunman Mehmet Ali Agca.
19 August 1981	In a two-minute dogfight over the Gulf of Sidra, Libyan pilots fire on two Navy fighter jets, only to be shot down themselves.
6 October 1981	President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt is assassinated while watching a parade in Cairo.
2 December 1981	The White House confirms news reports that Libyan hit squads have entered the United States.
18 January 1982	Lieutenant Colonel Charles Robert Ray, a military attaché at the American embassy in Paris, is shot and killed by Lebanese terrorists.
10 March 1982	The US imposes a ban on imports of Libyan oil.
23 July 1982	Two American, two British, two Australian tourists are kidnapped and later killed by rebel forces in Zimbabwe.



11 August 1982	A bomb explodes under the seat cushion of a Pan Am jet during the approach into Honolulu Airport. One Japanese teenager is killed.
25 August 1982	A bomb is found on a Pan Am jet after the plane arrives in Rio de Janeiro. The bomb does not go off.
14 September 1982	Bashir Gemayel, president-elect of Lebanon, is assassinated in Beirut, nine days before he is to take office.
18 April 1983	A delivery van packed with explosives blows up in front of the American Embassy in Beirut, killing sixty-three people, seventeen of them Americans.
23 October 1983	The headquarters of the Marine Battalion Landing Team at Beirut airport is blown apart by a truck filled with explosives; 241 men are killed. A second bomb goes off at the French headquarters, killing fifty-nine.
25 October 1983	The US invades Grenada.
3 April 1984	President Reagan signs National Security Decision Directive 138 outlining US policy toward terrorism (involving preemptive and retaliatory strikes).
17 April 1984	Anti-Qaddafi demonstrators protesting in London are fired on from the Libyan People's Bureau. A police constable is killed, prompting England to break diplomatic relations with Libya.
July-August 1984	Mines are found in the Red Sea. Evidence later establishes that Libya planted them.
20 September 1984	A van bearing diplomatic plates explodes in front of the US Embassy annex in Christian East Beirut, killing two American military officers.
12 October 1984	A bomb explodes in the Grand Hotel in Brighton, England, where Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and most of her cabinet are staying. The Provisional Irish Republican Army claims responsibility.
3 June 1985	William Buckley, the kidnapped CIA station chief, dies in captivity in Beirut.
14 June 1985	TWA Flight 847 is hijacked on its way from Athens to Rome with 153 people on board.
4 October 1985	Islamic Holy War announces the execution of William Buckley.
7 October 1985	Four armed men hijack an Italian cruise liner, the <i>Achille Lauro</i> , off the coast of Egypt. One American is killed.
9 October 1985	US Navy jets intercept an Egyptian airliner carrying the hijackers of the <i>Achille Lauro</i> .
23 November 1985	An EgyptAir jet is hijacked to Malta by three members of the Abu Nidal organization. Sixty passengers are killed, making it the bloodiest hijacking on record. CIA reports held that Qaddafi had paid as much as \$5 million for the hijacking.
27 December 1985	Simultaneous attacks are carried out at the El Al ticket counters in the Rome and Vienna airports by Palestinian terrorists; twenty people, including five Americans, are killed.
7 January 1986	The US severs all economic ties with Libya and orders all Americans to leave immediately, in retaliation for the attacks at the Rome and Vienna airports.
24 March 1986	During a naval exercise held in the Gulf of Sidra, US aircraft are fired on by Libyan SA-5 missiles. The United States fires back.
25 March 1986	Qaddafi sends a message to his People's Bureaus in East Berlin, Paris, Rome, Madrid, and other European capitals to plan terrorist attacks against American targets.
2 April 1986	A bomb under a seat on TWA Flight 840 en route from Rome to Athens explodes, sucking four Americans, one a nine-month-old baby, out the gaping hole.
5 April 1986	The La Belle disco is bombed in West Berlin. One American is killed instantly; another is mortally wounded.
Shaded rows attributable to Libya	
Source: Martin's "Best Laid Plans"	

*Table 2*

We see in 1984 an increasing amount of activity on the part of Qaddafi's terrorists, again in keeping with his major motivations:

In December 1983 Algeria had rejected his plea for admission to its Maghreb friendship treaty with Mauritania and Tunisia on the basis of Libya's refusal to settle its border dispute with Algeria. Qaddafi's response came in the form of a commando attack launched from Libyan territory on the Algeria-Tunisia gas pipeline on January 9. The colonel's displeasure with King Hussein's moves relative to the Palestinian issue was expressed in the burning of the Jordanian embassy in Tripoli on February 18; Hussein responded by severing diplomatic relations with Libya. On March 10, during a stopover in Ndjamena, Chad, two bombs probably intended to detonate mid-flight exploded aboard a French passenger jet, injuring 25 people; the incident was traced to Libya. Six days later a Libyan jet attempted to bomb a radio station in Omdurman, Sudan, which had given air time to anti-Qaddafi Libyans; the bombs hit nearby buildings rather than the radio station, killing five people.<sup>22</sup>

This pace continued in 1985. There were plots to assassinate ambassadors in foreign countries. Qaddafi hosted a terrorist convention, sponsored Abu Nidal (vicious, professional terrorist group), sponsored the *Achille Lauro* hijacking, and ended the year with the 27 December Rome and Vienna massacres, which claimed 20 people from 8 nations to include 5 from the US:<sup>23</sup>

One of those killed in the murderous barrage was an eleven-year-old American schoolgirl named Natasha Simpson who was going home to see relatives over the Christmas holidays. As Oliver North later described it, one of the terrorists "blasted...Natasha Simpson to her knees, deliberately zeroed in and fired an extra burst at her head, just in case." She died in her father's arms. It was a typical Abu Nidal operation—no demands, no theater, just murder most foul. The terrorists who killed Natasha Simpson were carrying Tunisian passports that the Tunisian government identified as having been confiscated or stolen from Tunisian citizens working in Libya—a classic case of state-supported terrorism. Qaddafi hailed the airport massacres as "heroic actions."<sup>24</sup>

From the perspective of US-Libya relations, the mercurial Colonel Qaddafi was his own worst enemy. Vivid television footage showed corpses and huge pools of the victims' blood on the airport floors, and President Reagan and the American people were enraged.<sup>25</sup> Following those massacres, on 1 January 1986, following the 48 Tactical Fighter Wing's (TFW) New Year's Eve party, four aircrew members were called from RAF Lakenheath, United Kingdom, to Ramstein Air Base, Germany (USAFE Headquarters). The aircrew members were to discuss with the

senior officers at Ramstein what would be required to conduct an attack on Libya. The going in proposition was that it would be a unilateral effort, with little support from US allies (items such as overflight of France and permission to launch aircraft from Britain had to be resolved). Considering the international nature of Qaddafi's terrorist activities, some time should be taken to highlight the views of the international community regarding terrorism in general, and Qaddafi in particular.

#### **International Situation—Head in the Sand**

Author Brian Davis cites a recollection from Geoffrey Kemp, the senior Middle East specialist on the NSC staff from 1981 to 1985, pertaining to his perceptions of other administration officials:

Although there was consensus within the administration, the Congress and amongst our European allies and Arab friends that Qaddafi was a menace and that his activities should be curtailed, the consensus evaporated when it came to recommendation about specific actions. During private sessions, Arab and European statesmen were usually outspoken in their venom toward the Libyan leader...European attitudes changed over the years from mild amusement about our "thing" over Qaddafi to cautious agreement that he was a problem and some remedy had to be found. Yet *whenever it came down to the bottom line of "what shall we do about the man?" the silence was stunning.*<sup>26</sup> [Emphasis added]

Amazingly, even following the heinous December bombings, newspaper articles highlighted: "West Germany ruled out economic sanctions against Libya today [3 January 1986] as other Western European countries reacted coolly to American calls for collective action against Qaddafi," and "The Western Europeans, especially the Italians, have made it clear in recent days that they are reluctant to impose sanctions, in large part because of their economic ties with Libya, particularly their need for oil."<sup>27</sup> This lack of economic response had the effect of "watering down" the actions that the US took at that time. "The effect of the

President's action seemed anticlimactic because American trade, which in 1980 reached a high of \$7.6 billion, had already dropped to less than \$300 million for the first ten months of last year [1985]."<sup>23</sup> Why the ambivalent attitude towards a clearly ominous threat?

One fear may have been the desire to not drive the Libyan leader further into the hands of the Soviets. He had already completed several arms deals with them, purchasing among other items, the SA-5 surface-to-air missile system that would be a factor in March 1986.

Another may have been the general reluctance to siding with a superpower for fear of it appearing to the outside world as subservience. Europeans declared that economic sanctions never worked. However:

An exhaustive 1985 study had found that sanctions had been successful in 36% of cases overall and were yet more successful in destabilizing governments. Countries in economic distress were found to be particularly vulnerable to sanctions, and Libya in the midst of the oil glut was just such a country.<sup>24</sup>

Another possible argument against sanctions was that it might tend to rally the other Arab nations around the despot. These nations would then be hostile towards the West. Again, the Arab world was a source for oil, and this condition would not be particularly healthy for industrialized societies dependent on that commodity. Additionally, Qaddafi might become even more reckless if he were to be isolated.

Fear of retaliation from Libya towards any nation that supported the US position may also have been a factor. Throughout the preceding decade, certainly

by his actions as well as his words, Qaddafi had demonstrated willingness to use terrorism against those who supported his enemies (Tables 1 and 2).

The final motivator against the economic sanctions may have been one that is as old as the first time man bargained with another for sale of an item: greed. Libya was the sixteenth leading buyer of EEC exports; a British firm even sold execution chambers to the Qaddafi regime!<sup>30</sup>

So in the face of this international pariah, the United States was "forced" into a unilateral response with marginal support from its allies. The US had to prepare itself to go it alone.



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## CHAPTER NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Davis: p. 57.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.: p. 58
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.: p. 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.: p. 2.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.: p. 3.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.: p. 3.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.: p. 6.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.: p. 5.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.: p. 8.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.: p. 21.
- <sup>11</sup> Martin: p. 285.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.: p. 285.
- <sup>13</sup> Hallion: p. 85.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.: p. 99.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.: p. 88.
- <sup>16</sup> Ziemke: p. 53.
- <sup>17</sup> Wirls: p. 45.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.: pp. 44-45.
- <sup>19</sup> Davis: p. 57.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.: p. 59.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.: p. 61.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.: pp. 65-66.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.: p. 78.
- <sup>24</sup> Martin: p. 268.
- <sup>25</sup> Davis: p. 78.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.: p. 85.
- <sup>27</sup> Tagliabue: p. 1.
- <sup>28</sup> Weinraub: p. 1.
- <sup>29</sup> Davis: p. 86.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.: p. 87.



## CHAPTER 3

### *MERELY THE CONTINUATION OF POLICY BY OTHER MEANS*

*We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.*  
— Carl von Clausewitz, "On War"

#### United States Prepares to Counter Qaddafi

In January 1986, President Reagan could not irrefutably link the Rome and Vienna bombings to Qaddafi. Abu Nidal was known to frequent Damascus and Tehran as well as Libya.<sup>1</sup> President Reagan's "limits to our patience" message only had one stipulation, that being undeniable proof of guilt, and this he was still lacking. Simultaneously, a strategy was formed to "scare" Qaddafi into quiescence while plans were formulated to attack Qaddafi should the scare not work. The "scaring" force would be the United States Navy.

#### Major US Actions in Gulf of Sidra Region January - April 1986

DATE	OPERATION CODE NAME	PARTICIPANTS	NOTES
26-30 January 1986	ATTAIN DOCUMENT	USS <i>Saratoga</i> Battle Gp USS <i>Coral Sea</i> Battle Gp	Exercise responded to Libyan-backed terrorism with freedom of navigation exercise north of Libyan- claimed waters
12-15 February 1986	ATTAIN DOCUMENT II	USS <i>Saratoga</i> Battle Gp USS <i>Coral Sea</i> Battle Gp	Forces continued operations near Libya
23-29 March 1986	ATTAIN DOCUMENT III / PRAIRIE FIRE	USS <i>Saratoga</i> Battle Gp USS <i>Coral Sea</i> Battle Gp USS <i>America</i> Battle Gp Surface Action Group	Sixteen-hour air/sea engagement resulted
14-15 April 1986	ELDORADO CANYON	USS <i>Coral Sea</i> Battle Gp USS <i>America</i> Battle Gp	USN joined with USAF aircraft to strike five targets

Source: Bolger's "Americans at War"

*Table 3*

## United States Navy Provides the Unheeded Warning

### "Line of Death" and US Target Areas for ELDORADO CANYON

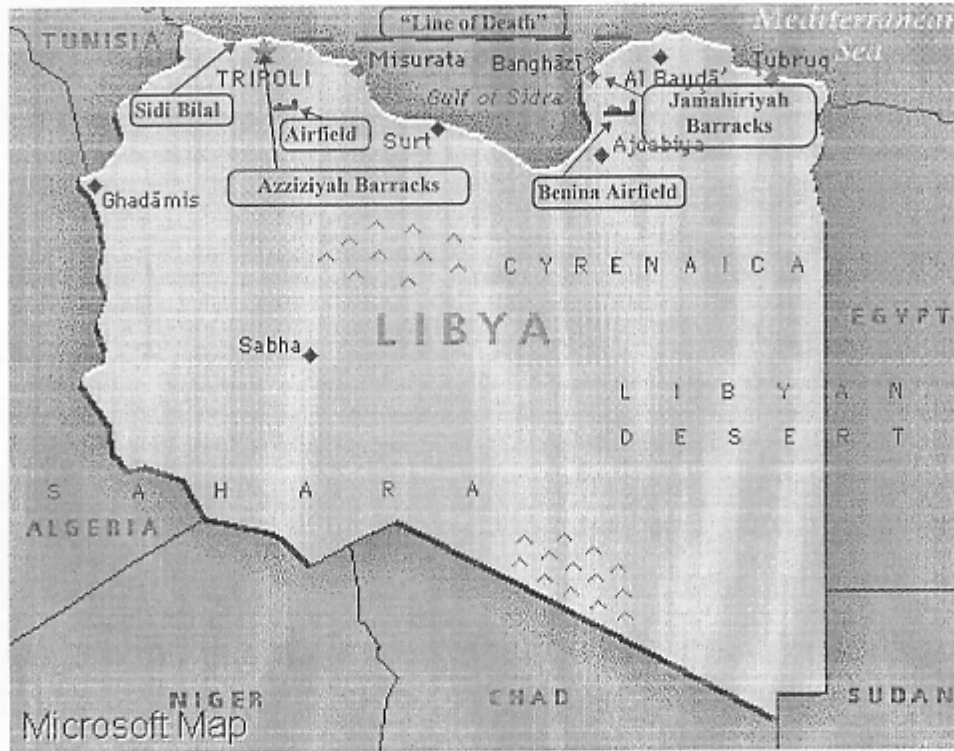


Figure 2

Beginning on 26 January 1986, the US Navy began monthly forays into the Gulf of Sidra to conduct "freedom of navigation" exercises (Table 3). ATTAIN DOCUMENT I and II were to be conducted north of the Libyan leader's declared "line of death" (Figure 2), which was at 32 degrees 30 minutes north latitude.<sup>2</sup> The Navy's primary purpose would seem to have been to gain insight into the capabilities and tendencies of the Libyan Arab Air Force. However, ATTAIN DOCUMENT III /PRAIRIE FIRE had the following objectives, which were notably south of the "line of death," but still in international waters:

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:	Exercise US freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Sidra.
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- OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES: 1) Conduct flight operations south of 32 degrees 30 minutes north latitude.  
2) Deploy surface action group south of 32 degrees 30 minutes north latitude.  
3) Defend fleet against Libyan air, surface, or subsurface responses.<sup>3</sup>

The primary difference in the missions was in the Rules of Engagement (ROE). For ATTAIN DOCUMENT exercises, "Do not fire until fired upon" was the ROE guidance. PRAIRIE FIRE however, was to be activated in the event of any violent Libyan response. The force would be placed on a "wartime footing, free all weapons for task force defense, and permit proportionate preemptive and retaliatory surface and air strikes against Libyan ships, planes, and shore facilities."<sup>4</sup>

The Navy did not have long to wait following their arrival on 23 March. Libyan SA-5 and SA-2 surface-to-air missiles were ineffectively shot at Navy aircraft during the early evening hours of 24 March. Three Libyan ships challenged the Naval group during the later evening hours. By morning, the radar sites that the surface-to-air missiles used for guidance had been destroyed by navy high-speed anti-radiation missiles (HARM), one of the Libyan ships was sunk, and the other two ships were rendered useless by bombing.<sup>5</sup> Back home, the debate lingered on concerning just how to define the strategy for dealing with Qaddafi.

#### **United States' Strategy Development for ELDORADO CANYON**

In his article, "Strategy: Defining It, Understanding It, and Making It," Professor William P. Snyder cites five important variables one might consider in

strategy development. Each one will be developed in turn. For now they are, doctrine, political/military relationships, national style, leadership, and technology.<sup>6</sup> Once those are known, resources, concepts (a plan) and objectives are blended to become strategy.<sup>7</sup>

**Doctrine.** From Snyder, doctrine is defined as, "Fundamental principles by which the military forces guide their actions in support of national objectives."<sup>8</sup> President Reagan was very clear in articulating that the US would not tolerate terrorism and would use the nation's tools against an aggressor. President Reagan was not the only agent of military doctrine. Was this rhetoric, or was there the will to support the words? Qaddafi's guess was incorrect.

Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger's doctrine regarding the use of military force stemmed from his firm belief that we should be sure of "winning."<sup>9</sup> This was a hold-over from the US defeat in Vietnam. First described in November 1984, it proposed six tests before committing forces overseas: 1) Were American vital interests at stake? 2) Are the issues so important that we will commit enough forces to win? 3) Are the political and military objectives clearly defined? 4) Are the forces sized to achieve the objectives? 5) Do the American people support the objectives? 6) Are forces to be committed only as a last resort?<sup>10</sup> The underlining intent of these questions was to avoid past mistakes in the employment of US armed forces.

**Political/Military Relationship.** From Snyder, "The degree to which [the resource component of strategy] is achieved at the national and military strategy

levels is often affected by the nature of the political-military relationships in society.”<sup>11</sup> As mentioned earlier, the beginning of the Reagan years saw the emergence of better relations between US political and military agencies. Trust and confidence, eroded by the Vietnam War and subsequent “failures,” were beginning to surface. However, Weinberger articulated another “rule” which displays a lack of confidence in senior military leadership: “My invariable practice was to *double, at least, any Joint Chief recommendations as to the size of a force required*, since I had in mind that one of the major problems with our attempt to rescue our hostages in Iran in 1979 was that we sent too few helicopters.”<sup>12</sup> [Emphasis added] This “doubling factor” may have facilitated the downing of that F-111F. We will discuss this point in a later chapter.

**National Style.** Snyder defines national style as, “That country’s history, culture, geography, and its past military experience, affecting its strategic approach.”<sup>13</sup> “Typical” US style could be described as “slow to anger, quick to resolve.” The US publicizes its desire to not be the aggressor. Rather, it prides itself on carrying on defensive reactions to incursions of its “rights” (or those of its allies) or its national interests. There had only been a few nations that had undertaken transnational military retaliation against terrorism, and the US was not one of them.<sup>14</sup> One may recall the raid on Entebbe conducted by Israeli forces in 1976 as one of the few military responses taken by a nation against terrorism:

After an Air France Airbus, en route from Tel Aviv to Paris and with many Jewish passengers on board, was hijacked to Entebbe, [in southern Uganda] the Israelis refused to accept terms for the safe release of the hostages. Instead they planned, and then mounted, an audacious raid, details of which remain obscure.<sup>15</sup>



The US also does not publicly endorse murder. During a 27 April 1986 "Face the Nation" interview with Secretary of State George Shultz, the question was posed: "Would you like to see the prohibition lifted against political assassination?" To which he answered, "No...because I think it doesn't fit our way of thinking about how to do things."<sup>16</sup> This style limits the lengths that the US will go, what it would "lose as it looked itself in the mirror."

The final area to discuss in this section concerns timing, the "quick to resolve" aspect. It is in the American psyche that military actions should be swift, accurate and of short time-duration. We see this even today, especially in the aftermath of Desert Storm. One of General Colin Powell's propositions on when it is appropriate to use military force is, "Military force should be used only in an overwhelming fashion."<sup>17</sup> The intent here is to crush the enemy, meet the objectives, minimize friendly losses, and get back home. President Clinton's 1995 National Security Strategy includes the comment, "The United States must deploy *robust and flexible* military forces that can accomplish a variety of tasks."<sup>18</sup> [Emphasis added]

**Leadership.** Snyder writes, "Of all the variables that affect planning, leadership is the most important. None of the other factors *determines* or dictates the final strategy."<sup>19</sup> As discussed previously, national leadership was divided regarding how to best handle Qaddafi. The "hawks" included: Shultz, National Security Advisor Robert C. McFarlane, his deputy, Admiral John Poindexter, the National Security Council staff, and CIA Director William Casey. The "doves" were:



Weinberger, the JCS, Vice President Bush, and the State Department regional bureaus.<sup>20</sup> President Reagan, in spite of his "hard line" address was cautious about the use of military force, and was susceptible to being swayed by Weinberger.<sup>21</sup> Note here that the SECDEF was generally not in favor of military intervention, and the SECSTATE was in favor of a retaliatory strike. In Weinberger's view:

"Employing our forces almost indiscriminately and as a regular and customary part of our diplomatic efforts would surely plunge us headlong into the sort of domestic turmoil we experienced during the Vietnam war, without accomplishing the goal for which we committed our forces."

Contrast that view with Shultz's:

"Terrorism is a contagious disease that will inevitably spread if it goes untreated...one of the best deterrents to terrorism is the certainty that swift and sure measures will be taken against those who engage in it. If terrorism is truly a threat to Western moral values, our morality must not paralyze us; it must give us the courage to face up to the threat."<sup>22</sup>

Shultz's voice would eventually prevail.

**Technology.** According to Snyder: "Military history is replete with instances in which the outcome of a battle or campaign turned on technological advantage."<sup>23</sup> We have seen earlier that President Reagan sought to reverse the "hollow force" trend. His presidency was marked by an increase in military spending and strength. Throughout this period significant advances had been made in aircraft capability, electronic combat, munitions capacity, airlift, air refueling, and most importantly, training of the all-volunteer force. Air Force fighter technology included the F-15 air-to-air fighter, the F-16 multi-role fighter, the F-111F with the Pave Tack system, and the F-117 stealth fighter (then a "black"

program).<sup>24</sup> The KC-10 had joined the force, and would be indispensable to the ELDORADO CANYON mission—six refuelings were planned, four before the attack and two afterwards. “Realistic combat” exercises abounded, with the adage “train the way you will fight” imbedded in the day-to-day operational tempo.

With an awareness of the above five variables, strategy development could proceed. The strategic and operational objectives for ELDORADO CANYON became as follows:

- STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: Destroy major elements of Libya’s terrorist command, training, and support infrastructure.
- OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES:
- 1) Bomb terrorist facilities in Tripoli:  
Azziziyah Barracks, Murat Sidi Bilal Training Camp, Tripoli military airfield.
  - 2) Bomb terrorist facility in Benghazi:  
Jamahiriyah Barracks.
  - 3) Suppress Libyan air defenses: bomb Benina military airfield, destroy air defense radar network.<sup>25</sup>

The overall strategy for ELDORADO CANYON was succinctly stated by National Command Authorities: “Inflict maximum visible damage while assuring minimum collateral damage” on the headquarters, terrorist facilities, and military assets that supported Qaddafi’s subversive activities.<sup>26</sup> The objective of the retaliatory strike was not one of “tit-for-tat.” Rather, it dealt with demonstrating to Qaddafi the costs he would have to pay to continue his terrorist behavior, and therefore provide deterrence for the law abiding world. Said Shultz: “It’s not a question of settling scores; it’s a question of acting against terrorism, of saying to

terrorists that the acts they perpetrate will cost them.”<sup>27</sup> USAF resources would be 18 F-111F aircraft and a complement of support assets to ensure the 3 Libyan target areas assigned to the unit were attacked.

### **Was the United States’ Strategy Sound?**

Philip A. Crowl provides a model consisting of six questions one may ask to determine the soundness of a national strategy.<sup>28</sup> These questions will be addressed first, then we will put the Weinberger doctrine to the test. In the case of ELDORADO CANYON, one should bear in mind that in a “small” operation such as this, there is a blurring of national, operational, military, and tactical concerns.

What is it about? The “right” of US citizens at home and abroad to not be held “hostage” by fear of terrorism, was clear. Throughout the period, the US took a stand politically and economically, and was now evolving to use the military “tool” of national power. Shultz, in a speech delivered to a New York synagogue, entitled “*Terrorism and the Modern World*,” said:

“...We face a choice between doing nothing or employing military force...The public must understand before the fact that there is potential for loss of life of some of our fighting men and the loss of life of some innocent people...Fighting terrorism will not be a clean or pleasant contest, but we have no choice but to play it.”<sup>29</sup>

The raid was about “getting the US’s head out of the sand!”

Is the national military strategy tailored to meet the national political objectives? The USAF’s strategy was directly applied to the 48 TFW’s tactical operation. In that national strategy, however, came the phraseology that would have a serious impact on the tactical plan. The words “maximum visible

damage" and "minimum collateral damage" formed the rationale for force structure. In a meeting with General Charles L. Donnelly (CINC USAFE) the priorities of these two phrases were clarified for the 48 TFW's Vice Wing Commander, Colonel Robert E. Venkus: "visible damage was the primary goal, greater than collateral damage, greater than the risks to the aircrew."<sup>30</sup> How did this play in force structure?

The wing had informed senior leadership that the maximum number of aircraft that should be employed on the Azziziyah Barracks (Qaddafi's house and headquarters) was six. Due to the meteorology, threats, target location and target layout, the aircraft would approach the barracks in a "stream"—thirty seconds between aircraft, one after the other. Time deconfliction would be used because the F-111Fs would be flying with all their external lights off—they would be unable to see and avoid their comrades. With thirty seconds between each, the time between the first aircraft and the sixth would be two and one-half minutes. If this stream was increased to nine aircraft, the time interval between the first and last aircraft would therefore be four minutes. The extra one and one-half minutes could enable the Libyan anti-aircraft units in acquiring the trailing forces.

The direction came from European Command (EUCOM), either CINCEUR, Army General Bernard Rogers or his deputy, Air Force General Richard Lawson, that nine aircraft would be used.<sup>31</sup> It is well known that this information was passed to the unit less than 48 hours prior to takeoff! Weinberger's rule of "at least doubling" the request of the military commanders may have come into play here. If

General Rogers believed that Weinberger might have the propensity to increase the attack force, Rogers may have been more inclined to robust the operation on his own versus allowing the SECDEF to do it.

The total F-111F "package" had been planned since the very first briefing in January 1986 for 6 aircraft covering one target area, and now to cover the three target areas, 18 would be employed. One of the commanders of the raid (whose identity must still remain secret) said, "I was absolutely convinced that given the competence of Libyan armed forces and the state of affairs in Libya we could sneak in there and sneak out. I felt a bigger package was more likely to tip them off."<sup>32</sup>

Venkus believes that Karma-52 was hit somehow by one of the many surface-to-air threats. The aircraft caught fire, the crew lost control and ejected, but too low for parachute deployment. They would have been the eighth F-111F to overfly the Azziziyah Barracks, their planned time-over-target was three and one-half minutes after the first bombs detonated. Because the aircraft were flying with their "lights out," strictly by timing, without reference to other aircraft, it is likely that "Karma-52" was flying the scheduled time irrespective of whomever may have dropped out of the "formation."<sup>33</sup> Venkus' conclusion is probably correct, based upon the January 1989 autopsy results conducted on Ribas-Dominicci, the only one of the two crewmen recovered—death by drowning, no fractures, no internal injuries.<sup>34</sup>

We have seen in this section national decisions, national strategy making, and the direct impact those decisions, those strategies, have from a tactical perspective in a campaign such as this. When the "shooters" are virtually in direct



contact with the (political) NCA over the target area, there is a blurring of the national, operational, and tactical perspectives in war. This may therefore impact the linkage between the national military strategy and the national political objective.

What are the limits of military power? The limits in this scenario revolved around target location, a more "tactical" consideration, but one with strategic implication. Azziziyah Barracks was located "downtown" Tripoli, surrounded by residences. This would serve to exacerbate the "minimum collateral damage" situation, particularly after flying in the dark and over water with minimal radar references for approximately five hours just to get in to the target area.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, the chaos created by dust, smoke, and fire from any previous deliveries hampers target acquisition, which would increase the potential for collateral damage or a complete miss of the specific impact point.<sup>36</sup> In the case of ELDORADO CANYON, with strict rules of engagement, the "fog and friction" of smoke, dust, and fire may obscure the target area such that the crew would not release their weapons. Therefore, more airplanes tasked to strike the same general target area does not necessarily increase the odds of destroying that target proportionately to the increase in the potential for collateral damage. The challenge at the tactical level is getting the proper "mix" of aircraft in relation to the threat, the target, and the conditions the air crew must fly in.

What are the alternatives? Political and economic alternatives had been used, at least unilaterally by the US. The administration continued throughout the

period prior to the raid to solicit international “stress” on Qaddafi, to no avail. The military option was the major remaining national tool. Of course the question could be asked: Why Qaddafi? Weren’t there other state-supported terrorists in the world? Authors Martin and Walcott give some insight:

Qaddafi was hardly the world’s most dangerous supporter of terrorism. Iran and Syria were much deadlier. What set Qaddafi apart was his blatant support for terrorism and his vulnerability to reprisal. Iran was virtually immune from attack, particularly now that it was involved in secret negotiations to free the Americans held hostage by Hezbollah in Lebanon. Syria was protected by its treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union. Libya had no secret negotiations with the United States, no treaty with the Soviet Union, and almost no friends.<sup>37</sup>

Having exhausted its political and economic options, what other military options could the US have employed from an air perspective?

On the far left of the scale might have been some sort of air embargo. This would probably heavily involve the Navy, and could be long-lasting (recall “national style” of get in and get out). The decision would have to be made about what types of air travel the US would allow into and out of Libya, if any. The international environment would be a large factor in this decision—Would Europe, the North East African and the Middle East nations support this approach? But the primary question that would have to be asked is, “What effect would this type of action have on Qaddafi?—Would that response make it painfully clear to him that the US would not tolerate terrorism?”

On the far right of the scale would be to launch a major offensive action against Libya. There is no question that the US had the military might to go to war against Qaddafi. Again, we would have to seriously consider the international

environment. Would a coalition be possible? Would that type of US response bring solidarity to the terrorist world, as they joined to combat the US "behemoth?" Would not that type of action unnecessarily punish the Libyan people who were not officially our enemies? Would that reaction be likened to using a sledge hammer to drive in a thumb tack? Would this approach fit our national style?

The answer for this scenario was somewhere in the middle of the two approaches presented. The ELDORADO CANYON mission was designed to send a quick, unquestionable message to Qaddafi: stop the terrorism!

How strong is the home front? Qaddafi's actions did little to endear himself with the international community in general, but in particular with the American public. His acts of terrorism ran counter to the US way of life and desire for law and order. Each act stiffened US resolve, increasing the desire for action. Public opinion polls even showed a substantial popular enthusiasm for military action—67%.<sup>38</sup> So from a national perspective, President Reagan had strong support.

This again was quite a different matter from an international perspective, an area that might be included in the realm of "home front." While President Reagan increased sanctions, "...a West German Government spokesman, echoing the view of most Common Market countries, ruled out economic penalties as *not a suitable instrument*."<sup>39</sup> [Emphasis added] Having asked, with no effect, for support from its allies, America had the option of continuing with the sanctions (already seen to be ineffective) and/or conducting military operations unilaterally.<sup>40</sup>

Does the strategy overlook points of difference and exaggerate points of likeness between past and present? Weinberger's "at least double" rule was based upon his conclusion that past inability of the military to do what it claimed was primarily due to the inadequate number of resources projected for use. Wing leadership's recommendation that the attack force size be limited to six on Azziziyah Barracks was again due to past experiences with "bomber streams": the danger to the later members of the formation is greatly increased with the size of that formation when the ingress routing remains the same. These are different priorities. The first deals with target destruction, the second with force survival. In planning any operation there must be a balance of target destruction versus force survival, unless it is determined that one particularly outweighs the other. General Donnelly did the latter when he placed visible damage at a higher priority level than the risks to the aircrew.

Due to the uniqueness of the task—2,800 mile range, target attack in the middle of a town, greatest surface-to-air missile threat flown against to date, night, high-speed (600 knots) low level operation—there was little other "historical data" to draw from.

These factors all combined to set the stage for the planning, execution, and results of this landmark mission. How did the mission measure up when held under the light of Weinberger's doctrine? To view this, we will look at each of his questions in turn. Where similarities exist between his questions and Crowl's, the comments will be kept brief.

Were American vital interests at stake? I would link this question to Crowl's first, "What is it about?" Certainly Americans were targets worldwide, as evidenced by Qaddafi's comments (see Table 1, pages 7-8). The question becomes whether we could consider the threat one against our vital interests. Clearly terrorism was and is viewed as a threat to our vital national interests, as reflected in President Reagan's National Decision Directive, and President Clinton's National Security Strategy, presented at the outset of this work. The answer to this question was "yes."

Are the issues so important that we will commit enough forces to win? The discussions in this area clearly were not so much about "Do we have enough forces?" Rather, the issue for this type of military action was "How much is enough?" The answer to this question was "yes."

Are the political and military objectives clearly defined? This question can be linked to Crowl's "Is the national military strategy tailored to meet the national political objectives." We have already examined Crowl's question, the significant difference between the two questions is Weinberger's use of "clearly." Both the political and the military objectives need to be clearly understood by the participants. Based upon previous examination, this question can also be answered affirmatively.

Are the forces sized to achieve the objectives? As we examined Crowl, we saw that the wing's leadership proposed a force list sized to meet the objectives, and the national military leadership increased the force structure. One might



therefore argue that we employed a greater force than what was really required to accomplish the task, when compared to the risks and rules of engagement involved.

Do the American people support the objectives? This question will be more fully addressed in chapter five, but for now, reference to Table 6 indicates a high percentage of Americans (71%) in favor of the mission. The answer to this question is “yes.”

Are forces to be committed only as a last resort? Clearly, all means of dissuasion, from the political to the economic, were attempted. Qaddafi, for what ever reason, did not understand the US's resolve in this matter. This created a need for the ELDORADO CANYON mission to “go downtown.”

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## CHAPTER NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bolger: p. 386.

<sup>2</sup> The "Line of Death" was the point, south of which where Qaddafi declared he would "stand and fight."

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.: p. 394.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: p. 393.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: pp. 395-400.

<sup>6</sup> Snyder: p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: p. 78.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.: p. 82.

<sup>9</sup> It is beyond the purview of this paper to discuss whether Weinberger's comments should be called doctrine, criteria, principles, or guidance. From AFM 1-1, another definition of doctrine is given from Col. Dennis M. Drew and Dr. Donald M. Snow: "What we believe about the best way to do things." It is in this context that "doctrine" is used regarding Weinberger's comments. Additionally, since Newland and Johnson call Weinberger's remarks "doctrine," as does Hallion, this term will be used in this discussion.

<sup>10</sup> Hallion: p. 90.

<sup>11</sup> Snyder: p. 82.

<sup>12</sup> Hallion: p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> Snyder: p. 83.

<sup>14</sup> Davis: p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> Cold War Digest: p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Department of State Bulletin: p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Arnold: p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> Clinton: p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Snyder: p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> Davis: p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.: p. 62.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.: pp. 64-65.

<sup>23</sup> Snyder: p. 82.

<sup>24</sup> The F-111F Pave Tack system included an infra-red acquisition and targeting pod, which provided the laser energy to guide laser guided bombs such as the GBU-10 or GBU-12. This aircraft/weapons matchup proved to be highly effective during the Gulf War in 1990, gaining particular notoriety for "shelter-busting" and "tank plinking."

<sup>25</sup> Bolger: p. 406.

<sup>26</sup> Venkus: p. 85.

<sup>27</sup> Gwertzman: p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Crowl: pp. 91-97.

<sup>29</sup> Davis: pp. 64-65.

<sup>30</sup> Venkus: p. 88.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.: p. 93.

<sup>32</sup> Martin: p. 269.

<sup>33</sup> Typical F-111F night low level planning involved 30 seconds between attacking aircraft. This would place each aircraft no closer than 4-5 miles between the other during an ingress over a target area. Timing was key to deconflicting the flight paths, since visual deconfliction was not possible.

<sup>34</sup> Venkus: p. 79.

<sup>35</sup> The Inertial Navigation System (INS) in the F-111 had a significant drift rate when contrasted with today's fighter aircraft. This required "updating" the present position of the aircraft frequently through the use of the attack radar. This was not possible when in close proximity to the tanker fleet, nor was it possible for most of the Mediterranean crossing.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.: p. 88.

<sup>37</sup> Martin: p. 289.

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<sup>38</sup> Dodds: p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Taglibue: p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> ELDORADO CANYON: The Political & Public Relations Aftermath: p. 3.

## CHAPTER 4

### GOING "DOWNTOWN"

#### USAF ROUTE TO LIBYA



*Figure 3* (Source: Winnefeld & Johnson's *Joint Air Operations*)

#### The Order of Battle

Other naval forces than what were previously mentioned will not be addressed in detail here. Suffice it to say, the US Navy was present in abundance, and their role was crucial to the successful employment of the USAF fighter-bombers. The Navy provided the HARM and Shrike employment which destroyed threat systems and jamming aircraft to defeat others.<sup>1</sup> Their ships acted to cover the rear of the fighters following the attack as they returned to their tankers. They

were available if the requirement to eject presented itself. The Navy was also responsible for striking the eastern-most targets, at Jamahiriya Barracks and Benina Airfield (Figure 2, page 20). However, the focus of this work is on the Air Force role, and hence the order of battle will be confined to those forces, and the threats to those forces.

Libyan Order of Battle	USAF Order of Battle
<b>Libyan Arab Army</b>	<b>USAF</b>
9 surface-to-air missile battalions (SA-6, SA-8, SA-9)	Elements, 48th TFW F-111F
2 ZSU-23-4 anti-aircraft battalions	Elements, 20th TFW EF-111A
<b>Libyan Arab Air Force</b>	9 SRS U-2R, TR-1A
1 bomber squadron: 7 Tu-22 Blinder-A bombers	55 SRW RC-135V/W
3 interceptor squadrons: 32 Mirage F-1ED/BD;	9 SRW SR-71A, KC-135Q
143 MiG-23 Flogger-E; 55 MiG-25 Foxbat-A;	4950 TW C-135C
55 MiG-21 Fishbed	7 ACCS EC-135E
5 fighter-bomber squadrons:	960 AWCS E-3A
58 Mirage 5D/DE/5DD; 14 Mirage F-1/AD;	2 BW KC-10A, KC-135A
32 MiG-23BM Flogger-F	22 ARW KC-10A, KC-135A
100 Su-20/22 Fitter E/F/J	68 ARG KC-10A
3 surface to air missile brigades (Soviet SA-2, SA-3, SA-5, French Crotale)	116 ARS KC-135E
	380 ARW KC 135Q
	5 BW/ 7 BW/ 42 BW/ 92 BW/ 96 BW KC-135A
	97 BW/ 379 BW/ 410 BW/ 416 BW KC-135A
	509 BW/ 19 ARW/ 305 ARW KC-135A
Source: Bolger's "Americans at War"	

*Table 4*

### The Plan

In January 1986, when the four officers were ordered to Ramstein Air Base, there was no doubt about why the planning was taking place. Americans worldwide were incensed at the bombing of the airports.

The officers from Lakenheath were directed to draft strike plans for attacking Libya's two main air bases—Tripoli airfield just south of the capital and Benina 400 miles to the east across the Gulf of Sidra. Nobody mentioned it because nobody had to, but an air raid against Libya's two main airfields would serve as a mirror-image retaliation for the massacres at the Rome and Vienna airports just days earlier.<sup>2</sup>



Neither the officers involved nor the senior leadership back at RAF Lakenheath really thought that the plans would ever come to fruition, because planning for contingency operations is a way of life for military organizations. "Anyone who has served in a combat unit for any length of time has been through the drill again and again," wrote Venkus.<sup>3</sup> And, with each day that passed without an order to attack, the likelihood of the attack diminished. During this entire time, for reasons of security, only a few people in the wing were brought into the planning process.

The plan called for sending six F-111Fs on a middle-of-the-night, low-level run that would cross the Libyan coast east of Tripoli, circle around behind the airport, turn north and hit the planes parked on the ramp with dozens of 500-pound bombs. The element of surprise would have enabled the group of aircraft to get in and out unscathed.<sup>4</sup>

The "surprise" that the planners forecast quickly vanished amid the news media's speculation on likely retaliation efforts on the US's part: "On January 3, [1986] *The Washington Post* reported that the military contingency planning has looked at the use of F/A-18 bombers on the carrier USS Coral Sea...B-52 bombers based in the United States and F-111F fighter bombers based in England."<sup>5</sup>

The plan capitalized on the "normal" readiness capabilities of the RAF Lakenheath unit. The basics of night low-level flying in the F-111F were practiced by everyone in the wing regardless as to whether they were on the commander's "secret" list of "Libya raiders." The major problem with an attack on any target in Libya was the range:

The bombing tactics were the same ones they practiced for targets in Central Europe—low-level, nighttime runs that used the F-111's terrain-following radar to pilot the plane automatically at altitudes and speeds no human could master. What

made the Libyan contingency so different was the extreme range involved: thousands of miles from Lakenheath to Libya and back, as opposed to hundreds of miles for targets in Central Europe. Theoretically, the F-111 had unlimited range because it was equipped for air-to-air refueling. But nighttime refueling was a tricky maneuver that threatened to throw off the split-second timing needed to hit targets at the same instant as the Navy.<sup>6</sup>

As the months passed, planning centered around resources for striking the two airfields, although it was believed that only one of them would be chosen. All told, the Lakenheath planners drew up strike plans for thirty-seven different targets, everything from oil refineries to military bases. The targets were, the Azziziyah Barracks in Tripoli, Murat Sidi Bilal Training Camp on the coast near Tripoli, the military portion of the airfield in Tripoli, the Jamahiriyah Barracks in Benghazi, and the Benina airfield (Figure 2, page 20). These targets were chosen as much for their location as for their connection to terrorism:

Qaddafi's compound in downtown Tripoli was the worst in terms of proximity to civilians and overall difficulty. Azziziyah Barracks ("splendid gate" in English) was the nerve center of the Qaddafi regime. Surrounded by a 15-foot wall, guarded by Soviet-made tanks, honeycombed with underground bunkers, Azziziyah contained within its 200 acres communications facilities, barracks for Qaddafi's personal security detachment, military staff headquarters, the house where his wife and seven children lived, and the Bedouin-style tent where he received visitors. If Qaddafi had to be convinced that he would pay a price for his support of terrorism, Azziziyah was the place to start.<sup>7</sup>

The military side of Tripoli's airport housed the big IL-76 Candid jet transports used to carry terrorists on their international forays. This target was more isolated, but required care to avoid the civilian side of the airport.<sup>8</sup>

The airport at Benina was the home of Libyan fighter interceptor aircraft. Striking them should prevent them from being a factor in the raid. It was a fairly isolated target.<sup>9</sup>

Murat Sidi Bilal schooled the PLO and other unsavory types in waterborne raids, ship seizures, port assaults, and underwater demolition work. Located on the water's edge but encircled by civilian apartments, the site would be hard to bomb, although not so bad as Azziziyah.<sup>10</sup>

The Jamahiriyah barracks in Benghazi featured an alternate command headquarters, another large chunk of Qaddafi's anti-coup troops, and visiting cadres from various terrorist groups. A MiG fighter warehouse on the grounds provided an additional incentive to plaster this target. As at Azziziyah and the swimmer's school,

civilian buildings surrounded this downtown compound, making it a difficult place to take out.<sup>11</sup>

As the planners understood the political situation, the F-111Fs would hit three targets if France would allow them overflight authority and if France would not, the strike would consist of six planes on one target. On Saturday, 12 April 1986 a planner's nightmare occurred. The good news was that Washington had received approval for the launch from British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The bad news was that French President François Mitterand said "No" to overflight. To make matters worse, the wing was directed to strike all three targets.

"When you go from six aircraft to eighteen aircraft, and you don't go across France, it's like throwing a bag of live snakes in a room," said one of the planners. Among other things, the crews to fly a mission that size had not been selected. All of the training of the past three months had been designed to prepare a handful of the wing's most experienced pilots and WSOs for the mission. Now, some of the younger, less experienced, less talented crews would have to be used. *The crews, at least, were on hand. The aerial tankers for the 5,800-mile round trip were still in the United States.*<sup>12</sup> [Emphasis added]

So with less than 48-hours to takeoff, the wing began "scrubbing" the list of aviators to create a crew list, and began determining the best 30 aircraft that would be configured for the mission.<sup>13</sup> At that time the wing had 71 aircraft available to fly, 106 mission-ready pilots, and 94 mission-ready WSOs.<sup>14</sup> While the planners were struggling with this problem, a final "wrinkle" was added: "They want nine, three, and six."<sup>15</sup> The order in which these were read off to the planners told them that USAFE wanted nine planes against Azziziyah, three against Sidi Bilal, and six

against Tripoli airfield. Forty-four hours before launch time the planners had to devise a new refueling and targeting plan!

Work for the planners continued into Sunday morning to complete the strike package:

The planners at Lakenheath decided to launch a total of twenty-four F-111s to be sure of putting eighteen over the targets. Five EF-111 electronic planes to jam the Libyan radars would launch from the RAF base at Upper Heyford; four would go the distance, and one reserve plane would turn back. Nineteen KC-10 air refueling tankers and ten smaller KC-135 tankers would carry the 7 million pounds of fuel needed for the mission; the KC-10s would refuel the F-111s, and the KC-135s would replenish the KC-10s. In all, fifty-eight aircraft would take off from four British bases on Monday evening.<sup>16</sup>

### **Into the Night—The Air Strikes**

From Lakenheath, Mildenhall, Fairford, and Upper Heyford, the F-111s, EF-111s, KC-10s, and KC-135s took off—the first bombing raid launched from these fields in East Anglia, United Kingdom since the end of World War II. The tankers lifted off first, at 1713 Greenwich Mean Time (1913 Libyan time), followed by the fighters at 1736 (1936 Libyan time).<sup>17</sup>

Several hours earlier the USAF Chief of Staff, General Charles Gabriel concluded the pre-mission briefing for the F-111F crews with a pep talk. It was at this moment that the reality of what they were about to do finally occurred to many of the aircrew.

When Gabriel finished, he asked if there were any questions. One of the pilots, Captain Fernando Ribas-Dominicci, raised his hand. When are we going back? He asked, meaning would there be a second mission after tonight's. Gabriel said he didn't know. That would depend on Libya's reaction. Ribas would never find out.<sup>18</sup>

The route of flight took the formation southwest, to Lands End, United Kingdom, then south, around France and Spain and "through" the Straits of Gibraltar for the "drop-off" points in the Mediterranean (Figure 3). Along the way,

the crews checked their aircraft systems, and sent the now unneeded spare aircraft back to base. This left three F-111Fs on each tanker—one on each wing, and one under the belly. Refueling, planned for four onloads, was really a continuous operation once the formation passed the Straits. The intent was to keep the fuel tanks full to expedite their departure from the formation to the dark, surface-hugging altitudes the mission was planned for. One F-111F missed the air strike because while it refueled in radio silence, the tanker crew (who did not realize that the last of their F-111Fs had not finished refueling) prematurely turned north to await the return flight. By the time the F-111F crew realized the error, it was out of position to participate. Another F-111F turned back later due to a failed bleed air duct in its engine compartment. The plane manned by Captains Ribas-Dominicci and Lorence crashed in the water prior to reaching the target.<sup>19</sup>

#### ELDORADO CANYON USAF Mission Results

CALL SIGN	TARGET	ASSESSMENT
REMIT-31	Azziziyah Barracks	Hit
REMIT-32	Azziziyah Barracks	Off dry
REMIT-33	Azziziyah Barracks	Hit
ELTON-41	Azziziyah Barracks	Abort - Pave Tack ROE
ELTON-42	Azziziyah Barracks	Remained with tanker
ELTON-43	Azziziyah Barracks	Abort - Wheel well hot (Bleed air duct failure)
KARMA-51	Azziziyah Barracks	Miss due to radar mis-identification
KARMA-52	Azziziyah Barracks	KIA
KARMA-53	Azziziyah Barracks	Abort - lost electrical generator prior to target
PUFFY-11	Tripoli Airfield	Hit
PUFFY-12	Tripoli Airfield	Abort - lost both TFR channels
PUFFY-13	Tripoli Airfield	Miss due to radar mis-identification
LUJAC-22	Tripoli Airfield	Hit
LUJAC-23	Tripoli Airfield	Hit
LUJAC-24	Tripoli Airfield	Miss - aircraft ballistics computer problem
JEWEL-61	Sidi Bilal	Miss - due to radar mis-identification
JEWEL-62	Sidi Bilal	Miss - due to radar mis-identification
JEWEL-63	Sidi Bilal	Hit
Source: Venkus' "Raid on Qaddafi"		TARGETS ASSESSED AS HITS ARE SHADED

Table 5



Once proceeding northbound, the crewmen joined with their respective tankers, filled their thirsty aircraft, and waited to hear positive words on the fate of Karma-52. None was forthcoming. Finally, after about one hour, Karma-51 broke radio silence and told the senior officers in the lead tanker, "I don't think Karma-52 made it," and with that the long trek home began.<sup>20</sup>

Radio silence was broken again during the uneventful return trip home. This time it was to tune the high frequency (HF) radio to a particular frequency and monitor the broadcast. It is on this note that we leave the ELDORADO CANYON mission:

Those who could receive it heard US Armed Forces Radio in Europe carrying a live feed of the White House press conference explaining the raid. With over four hours to go to Lakenheath, the aircrew listened in rapt attention. The broadcast concluded with the Armed Forces announcer dedicating his next two songs to those who had just been in combat for their nation. Homeward bound, the 48th's ELDORADO CANYON pilots and WSOs listened misty-eyed as their helmets' earphones filled with "Anchors Aweigh" and the "Air Force Song." One line from the latter predicts only two likely fates for combat crewmen: "we live in fame or go down in flame." Anonymity would prevent the former, and two of their buddies had not avoided the latter.<sup>21</sup>

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## CHAPTER NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The AGM-88 HARM missile is an air-to-surface tactical missile designed to seek out and destroy enemy radar-equipped air defense systems. Its proportional guidance system homes in on enemy radar emissions. The AGM-45 Shrike missile is an anti-radiation missile also designed to home in on hostile anti-aircraft radars. It has a lesser capability than the HARM.

<sup>2</sup> Martin: p. 259.

<sup>3</sup> Venkus: pp. 34-35.

<sup>4</sup> Martin: p. 268.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: p. 269.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: p. 273.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: pp. 277-278.

<sup>8</sup> Bolger: p. 411.

<sup>9</sup> Anno: p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> Bolger.: p. 411.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.: p. 411.

<sup>12</sup> Martin: p. 293.

<sup>13</sup> To "ensure" 18 aircraft made it to the target, there would be 6 "air-spare" aircraft whose crews would replace any of the primary aircraft that encountered a malfunction prior to passing the Straits of Gibraltar. To "ensure" 24 aircraft launched, an additional 6 aircraft would be configured as "ground-spares."

<sup>14</sup> History of the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing—1 Jan-30 Jun 1986: pp. 19, 70.

<sup>15</sup> Martin: p. 294.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.: pp. 296-297.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.: p. 302.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.: p. 300.

<sup>19</sup> Venkus: p. 146.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: p. 108.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.: p. 111.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: p. 108.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.: p. 111.

## CHAPTER 5

### *CONTROVERSIES IN MEASURING SUCCESS FOR THE FUTURE PEACE*

#### Controversy over "Success"—National Environment

One may assess the mission on a tactical, operational, or national level. The metric used will determine the answer.

On a tactical level, one might be primarily concerned with percentages. In this case, 6 out of 18 USAF aircraft (33%) striking their assigned targets would probably not earn high marks. There were several mitigating circumstances that bore some responsibility for the poor results. Five of the aircraft mis-identified the target area due to incorrect coordinates of an island update point provided to the crews during mission planning. These incorrect coordinates would cause the WSOs to be looking in the incorrect place for the target, once they approached the target area. Three aircraft aborted the mission inbound to the target due to aircraft malfunctions. One crew was killed in action. One aircraft remained with the tanker and never attempted to ingress to the target area. One aircraft missed the target area due to a ballistics computer problem that would have been transparent to the crew. One crew aborted because, by the ROE, if the target was not positively identified, they were not to release their weapon. This last reason demonstrates the professionalism of the crews who had been strapped in to an aircraft for seven hours, survived a dense anti-air threat and the hazards of operating 200 feet above the water at night. They remembered the ROE, and in the final seconds prior to weapons release, did not drop their weapons.<sup>1</sup>

To assess the mission from an operational perspective, a review of the operational objectives is in order: bomb the terrorist facilities and suppress the Libyan air defenses. Referring back to Table 5, we can see that at least one aircraft employed its ordnance in each of the three target areas. From an operational perspective, therefore, the mission could be called a success.

The strategic perspective can likewise be approached by reference to what was stated prior to the mission's execution: "destroy major elements of Libya's terrorist command, training, and support infrastructure," and "inflict maximum visible damage while assuring minimum collateral damage." With respect to the former: at Azziziyah Barracks Qaddafi's main residence and the administration building suffered some exterior damage; at Sidi Bilal the swimming pool building used by the terrorists to train was severely damaged; at the Tripoli airport several IL-76 aircraft were destroyed. This would probably earn a "satisfactory" rating. With respect to the latter task, there was plenty of visible damage with a minimum of civilian casualties. The nature of the barracks mission, in the center of Tripoli, a town of 1 million people would have made "no civilian casualties" an impossible task. The mission though was as much a political mission as a military one. So how effective was it politically?

Immediately after the mission, there was some significant doubt that it could be considered anything but a political disaster. Various pundits speculated on the major damage which had been done to the NATO alliance; to our relations with the Arab world; and to US bilateral relations with Italy, France, Spain, and England among others. A wave of revenge terrorist attacks was predicted.<sup>2</sup>



### Controversy over "Success"—Allied Perspective

The fears that our European allies had early in 1986 were only exacerbated by the raid. The widespread support in the US was in marked contrast to the reaction in Europe. The Europeans saw themselves as even bigger targets in an expanding war with terrorists.<sup>3</sup> But even in Europe there were two ways of thinking about the problem. Two polls bore this out:

Do you approve or disapprove of US military action against Libya?			
	Approve	Disapp	Not Sure
US	71%	20%	9%
Britain	29%	66%	5%
SOURCE: Church's "Hitting the Source"			

Table 6

Do you think your government has been too supportive, not supportive enough or just right with respect to US policy against Libya?			
	Britain	W. Ger.	France
Too Supportive	56%	22%	5%
Not Supportive Enough	5%	16%	43%
About Right	36%	47%	44%
Don't Know	3%	15%	8%
SOURCE: Whitaker's "Getting Rid of Qaddafi"			

Table 7

Britons who disliked Thatcher denounced her "supine" acquiescence to American wishes. The "Atlanticist" faction in France lambasted Mitterand and Prime Minister Jacques Chirac for failing to help Ronald Reagan. Former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing allowed as how he "regretted" the decision, marking a visible split in Chirac's tenuous government coalition. West Germany's Kohl walked a tightrope between his personal sympathy for American motives and the majority of Germans' opposition to the deeds. Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez, a strong NATO supporter, faced a public that disapproved of the attack and feared Libyan reprisals. Although real, the damage seemed unlikely to be permanent. And on both sides of the Atlantic, officials were at pains to stress what their citizens already knew: that they must *focus less on the differences* within the alliance and more on their common enemy: the murderous forces of international terror.<sup>4</sup> [Emphasis added]

"Focus," the members of the European Economic Community (EEC) did. On 21 April 1986 they decided to cut Libyan diplomatic representation in EEC countries and EEC representation in Libya to the minimum level necessary to

maintain diplomatic status, among other sanctions.<sup>5</sup> It is unfortunate that the raid had to energize the Europeans to take some action. Perhaps it was due to fear of imminent reprisal that: "Western intelligence and law enforcement agencies began devoting more resources to and cooperating more closely than ever before in tracking and hampering the movements of terrorists, with an increase in security."<sup>6</sup>

#### **Controversy over "Success"—Lessons for Terrorists**

It would seem that state-sponsored terrorists indeed were "educated" by the raid. An important lesson was that, "In hiding behind the sponsorship of a state, terrorists run the risk of exposing that state to retaliation. By fixing themselves to a geographic area, terrorists make possible surgical air strikes or other forms of retaliatory options."<sup>7</sup>

Operation ELDORADO CANYON "exploded the myth of Libya as intimidating and exposed the colonel as weak, isolated, and vulnerable."<sup>8</sup> Libya was deemed responsible for 19 terrorist attacks in 1986, but had only directed 6 attacks each year in 1987 and 1988. Syria's numbers were 34 attacks in 1985, 6 in 1986, 1 in 1987, and none in 1988.<sup>9</sup> This had the effect of reducing the fatalities due to terrorism as well: 38 in 1985, to 12 in 1986, to 7 in 1987.<sup>10</sup> Clearly the effect of the raid was to help break the cycle of accelerating Middle Eastern terrorism dating from 1983.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Controversies over the Future**

In the introduction to his book "Raid on Qaddafi," Venkus declares "based on unique circumstances that were prerequisites for the raid, it is unlikely that a

similar mission will occur in the foreseeable future.”<sup>12</sup> This perception of the future is debated by Stephen Sloan in his book “Beating International Terrorism.” The author advocates that the military develop a specific strategy to counter terrorism: “...selection of forces and targets could be applied *preemptively* when there is overwhelming evidence that the terrorist state is *about to initiate an attack* against American citizens and interests.”<sup>13</sup> [Emphasis added]

It is this author’s view that in our multi-polar, post-Cold War world, we perhaps stand a greater chance of employing “Global Reach—Global Power” in a contingency operation such as the 14-15 April 1986 mission. Nations that might have been kept at bay by the two super power nations are now “free” to conduct themselves in destabilizing ways. This view is shared by authors Winnefeld and Johnson, who write, “The future holds more ELDORADO CANYONS than Desert Storms.”<sup>14</sup>

The fact that President Clinton mentions the threat of “rogue states” and allots a section of his national security strategy to “Combating Terrorism” should give us pause to consider the possibility of a military unit being tasked to uphold law and order for the law abiding nations of the world. It is for this reason that Operation ELDORADO CANYON holds important lessons. There can be no question that other subversive elements around the world should have been “educated” along with Colonel Qaddafi, at his expense. These elements would at a minimum have to account for the possibility of some sort of retaliation in their

planning. Hopefully, the deterrent value of ELDORADO CANYON will remain true.

#### **The Future Peace—Will and Ability**

A quantifiable value can not be placed on the ELDORADO CANYON mission. No one will ever know what future terrorist activities were halted as a result of that mission, if any. However, the US national leadership had the “guts” to take a stand, and that can not be ignored by would-be terrorists. The valiant efforts of the national leadership all the way down to the crews in helping to make the world a safer place can indeed be “graded” as successful. From Shultz:

*We must make it clear that while we are not looking around for ways to use force, and we seek other means of putting pressure on and denying terrorists their objectives,...there are situations where we will use force and we will have the will and the ability.<sup>15</sup>*

To those that flew, and more importantly, the two who died, a grateful, and safer nation and world must express its gratitude.

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## CHAPTER NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Venkus: p. 144.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.: p. 149.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.: p. 151.
- <sup>4</sup> Sullivan: pp. 34-35.
- <sup>5</sup> Davis: p. 160.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.: p. 161.
- <sup>7</sup> Dodds: pp. 1-2.
- <sup>8</sup> Venkus: p. 155.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.: p. 155.
- <sup>10</sup> Davis: p. 166.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.: p. 169.
- <sup>12</sup> Venkus: p. xi.
- <sup>13</sup> Sloan: p. 28.
- <sup>14</sup> Winnefeld: p. 95.
- <sup>15</sup> Davis: p. 168.



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